

March 17, 2021

Testimony in support of SB 761

Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, ranking members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco and distinguished Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

I am writing in favor of SB 761: *An Act Permitting the Use of Citizens' Election Program Grant Funds to Offset a Participating Candidate's Child Care Costs*, and to ask you to vote this bill favorably out of your committee.

In the 2018 general election a candidate running for State Representative was denied reimbursement by the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) for childcare expenses. I do not believe that was a fair decision, nor in keeping with the spirit of the Citizen's Election Program (CEP). To redress this wrong, the candidate was forced to pursue legal action that ultimately led to a reversal of the decision. To keep this from happening again, the General Assembly must step in so that SEEC operates CEP in a fair and equitable manner. That is the purpose of SB 761.

This year your committee has considered a broad range of election-related bills. Most of them seek to make it easier for more people to vote, principles that I strongly favor. You might say they address the "demand" side of enabling free and fair democratic elections.

But to strengthen our representative democracy we also need to consider the "supply" side. How can we encourage more candidates to run for office, candidates who better reflect the electorate they are running to represent? How do we lower the barriers to running for office? One simple way is to lower the cost of mounting a campaign. That is one of the principal objectives of the CEP.

Running for office is tilted in favor of the affluent who are able to run campaigns unencumbered by the challenges that others confront, like the costs and constraints of campaigning while working and taking care of children. Fulfilling CEP's objective of expanding opportunities for women and less affluent candidates to run for public office can't be achieved if they are hamstrung by unfair reimbursement policies. That's exactly what the SEEC did when they refused to allow the costs of childcare while campaigning to be a permissible expense.

The CEP was "designed to encourage citizen participation and limit the role of private money in CT's political process." That can't happen if moms (or dads) dependent on paid daycare can't afford to run.

The Federal Election Commission and at least seven other states allow reimbursement of childcare expenses. It's time for Connecticut to do likewise, by passing SB 761.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jonathan Perloe
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